

Press Release

Gambia: calls for withdrawal of the case

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URGENT: The Gambia: Women's Rights Defenders Dr. Isatou Touray and Amie Bojang-Sissoho released on bail with outrageous bail conditions: A Call for the withdrawal of the case.

Coalition for Human Rights in the Gambia

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After spending ten days in detention the two prominent Women's Human Rights Defenders were granted bail on Wednesday 20th October, 2010 after a hearing in a crowded courtroom at the Banjul Magistrates Court. The bail bond is One Million Five Hundred Thousand Gambian Dalasis (over US\$ 50, 000) each, and a surety with a landed property.

Dr. Isatou Touray, the Executive Director and Amie Bojang- Sissoho, Programme Coordinator for the Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP) were arrested on Monday October 11th, 2010 by Gambian security personnel, detained at the Banjul Police station and then whisked to Banjul Magistrates Court the following day October 12th, which refused them bail and sent them to Mile Two Central Prisons. They were charged with theft of 30,000 (Thirty Thousand) Euros received from a Spanish NGO Yolocamba Solidaridad.

It could be recalled that in May 2010 the Presidency set up a panel of investigation into the allegation of mismanagement of funds from Yolocamba Solidaridad. The eight person panel stated in its report, that "the panel is of the opinion that the allegation that GAMCOTRAP has misappropriated 25,000 Euros is unfounded as correspondence, vouchers and receipts were seen. The panel is with the view that Yolocamba Solidaridad wanted to portray an image that GAMCOTRAP is a weak institution that lacks requisite capacity to implement project of that magnitude. Once this situation is bought Yolocamba Solidaridad will have the opportunity to register their own organisation."

The panel report also went on to say that "Yolocamba received all information regarding the financial report of the project before the deadline of submission of the reports." The panel therefore recommended to the President's office that "Yolocamba should send 151, 277 Euros to GAMCOTRAP to carry out the second phase of the project because the funds were raised as a result of the project proposal prepared by GAMCOTRAP".

Upon submission of its report to the office of the president, the panel of investigation was dissolved and some of its members dismissed from the services of the Gambian Government and a second panel put in place. No new report has yet been submitted.

One wonders what the interest of the Gambia Government is on this matter relating to two NGOs, especially since the report of the panel it had earlier set up is at variance with the allegations. The

Government should simply leave the two NGOs to sort out any problem that may exist between them. It should allow civil matters to take civil processes until a criminal matter is revealed in the process.

If the press statement of 17 October, published online and purported to have come from Yolocamba is to go by, there is no point in proceeding with the case. According to the President of Yolocamba, Maria Jesus Gayol Rodriguez, "SOLIDARITY YOLOCAMBA demands the immediate release of members of the organisation GAMCOTRAP, Dr Isatou Touray and Amie Bojang Sissoho and respect for human rights. The problem that caused her arrest corresponds to an administrative process that must be resolved, not for criminal justice." She demanded that "solutions are not used politically against GAMCOTRAP to damage her work defending human rights of Gambian women."

The government should simply act in accordance with the behest of Yolocamba by withdrawing the criminal case from court and allowing the two NGOs resolve whatever problem may exist between them.

Dr. Isatou Touray and Ms. Amie Bojang-Sissoho have for many years been active in the promotion of gender equality, rights of women and children, particularly in the fight against Female Genital Mutilation and other discriminatory practices. Dr Touray is also Secretary General of the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC). She was named 'Gambian of the Year' in 2008 by The News and Report Weekly Magazine for her work around FGM and promoting the rights of women and children. Dr. Touray is a board member of Women Living Under Muslim Laws for the past two years, and both women have been active in the network which promotes and protects the rights of women, especially in Muslim contexts and communities.

Amie Bojang Sissoho is a journalist and has contributed significantly to women and children's development particularly in the area of educational programming at the Gambia Radio and Television Services (GRTS).

The two women will again appear in court on November 3rd, 2010. The Coalition for Human Rights in The Gambia is calling on the Gambia Government to respect the constitutional and human rights of Dr. Isatou Touray and Amie Bojang Sissoho. The Coalition urges the Gambian authorities to guarantee the rights of the two women's rights defenders to a speedy, free, open and fair trial in an independent and impartial court as well as their security and dignity.

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ORGANISATIONS:

Inter African Network for Women, Media, Gender and Development - (FAMEDEV)

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

Syndicat des Professionnels de l'Information et de la Communication du Sénégal (SYNPICS)

Rencontre Africaine pour le Défense Des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO),

Amnesty International, Section Senegal

Radio Alternative Voice for Gambians-Radio AVG

Organisation Nationale des Droits de l'Homme (ONDH)

Réseau Presse et Parlement du Sénégal (REPPAS)

West African Journalists Association (WAJA).